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SUBJECT: INDIA'S COMMUNISTS ADOPT AMBITIOUS AGENDAS AT PARTY CONGRESSES

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Classified By: Charge Robert O. Blake, Jr. for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

1. (C) Summary: India's Communist parties have been energized by their growing power as "kingmakers" who keep the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) in power. During recently-concluded party congresses, they passed the baton to dynamic new leaders and broadened their agenda to take on ambitious new goals. Newly-elected Communist Party of India (Marxist) General Secretary Prakash Karat hopes to mobilize the Left around a program emphasizing rural concerns such as land reform and caste discrimination, while integrating the Indian Left into a worldwide movement against "globalization and liberalization." Confident that their power has solidified in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura, the Communists hope to expand into the "Hindi Belt" before forming a "Third Front" capable of coming to power in New Delhi. The Communists acknowledge that there is no alternative to improved US-India relations, which can benefit India, but view Washington as the architect of a world system that opposes Indian interests. The outcome of the West Bengal and Kerala state elections in 2006 will indicate whether they are able to maintain their current momentum. End Summary.

Passing the Torch

2. (U) The four parties of the Left Front (LF) completed their party Congresses between February 17 and April 11. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) Congress from April 6-11 was the most important, as the CPI(M) is the LF flagship. On April 11, CPI(M) General Secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet stepped down as the party General Secretary and the party elected Prakash Karat to replace him. His wife, Brinda Karat, became the first female elected to the CPI(M) Politburo.

3. (U) Karat quickly laid out an ambitious agenda that he hoped would further extend LF influence. In his acceptance speech, he emphasized that the CPI(M) was "a party of the young," and would continue to recruit among colleges and universities, while expanding beyond its traditional base in West Bengal, Tripura, and Kerala into the rural areas of the Hindi heartland on North India. Karat also pledged to move beyond the traditional Marxist emphasis on class identity to address the caste discrimination that plagues the Hindi-speaking states.

4. (U) The LF parties also agreed that their support for the Congress-dominated UPA government was only "temporary," and was aimed primarily at preventing a return of the BJP to power in New Delhi. However, Karat emphasized both to the press and to the Charge (reftel) that the LF would not withdraw support to the UPA, which would serve out a full term. While the LF opposes some UPA economic policies, he noted, it would keep the UPA in power as long as it implemented the Common Minimum Program (CMP).

5. (U) The CPI(M) pledged to work for the formation of a "Third Front" government that would not include Congress or the BJP, but the political situation would have to "mature" before this could occur. Karat pointed out that "We do not think this country requires a Congress-led combination and a BJP-led combination alone. There are enough forces to form a third alternative." He maintained that an LF led Front would provide a "more stable viable alternative," as it would not just be an electoral alliance but be based on a "common policy platform."

Nice to US in Person - Otherwise Very Tough

6. (C) In a May 4 meeting with the Charge (reftel), Karat was conciliatory, but his wrap-up article of the CPI(M) congress in the party newspaper "People's Democracy," was confrontational. Decrying Congress as a "bourgeois-landlord" party, Karat maintained that the CPI(M) will unite the Left parties, project a "democratic alternative," and strengthen the Left in Parliament.

7. (U) Claiming that "US imperialism is continuing its offensive," Karat accused the US of "violating the sovereignty of independent nations in its quest for total hegemony." Stating that the US "is prepared to utilize its

military might to make countries fall in line," Karat cited "the occupation of Iraq," threats against North Korea, Iran and Syria, "covert work against the Venezuelan government," and "hostile measures against Cuba," as evidence of US aggression.

18. (U) Karat listed the Left's principal goals as "advancing the struggle against communalism, pro-big business economic policies and imperialism." Urging Communists not to underestimate the power of the BJP and RSS to regroup following their recent "defeats," he questioned the ability of Congress to "carry out a consistent struggle against communal and divisive forces," and called on "the Left and other democratic and secular parties" to devise a joint program to come to power in New Delhi.

19. (U) Karat criticized the BJP/NDA for "facilitating" the growth of imperialism, "particularly US influence in India's domestic, economic, political and foreign policy affairs." Although there has been "a shift in emphasis," since the BJP defeat, Congress continues to "pursue policies of liberalization" and "the strategic collaboration with the US and its deep inroads remain." He noted that the CPI(M) has resolved to focus on India's countryside and rural economy, and social issues including the rights of dalits, tribals, religious minorities and women.

#### Other Communist Views

10. (C) In recent meetings with Poloff, other Communist leaders were not as united as their public facade suggests. Decrying the Communist Party of India (CPI) as "not genuinely Marxist," Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) leader Abani Roy criticized the party as "opportunistic, too close to Congress, and too willing to compromise for power." Roy was also suspicious of plans to expand into the "Hindi Belt," urging Left parties not to subordinate their interests to regional parties to gain influence, and saying that Leftists must remain "true to their principles." Praising Karat as a "genuine Marxist," Roy predicted that he would present a moderate face only as a tactic to gain power and "institute Marxism."

11. (C) CPI Secretary D Rajan emphasized the need for "left unity," to construct a united movement that would include the Maoists. Noting that Maoists must first renounce violence and embrace parliamentary democracy, he predicted that the CPI and CPI(M) would unite, before making overtures to the Maoist Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), with the ultimate goal of creating a united Communist movement.

12. (C) CPI MP S Sudhakra Reddy emphasized that Congress did not do enough to combat secularism, pointing out that the CPI supported the US revocation of Gujarat Chief Minister Modi's visa, while the "left of center" Congress defended the "right-wing" Modi in Parliament. Reddy accused Congress of "ignoring Left analysis" on FDI in key sectors such as insurance and telecommunication, and failing to "regulate multi-national corporations (MNCs)." He emphasized that the Left is determined to "defend the public sector" and accused Congress of reneging on agreements to reopen "sick units." Reddy emphasized that the Indian Left favored a Nehru-style mixed economy and did not advocate total nationalization. The CPI is not opposed to privatization, but would not allow MNCs and Indian capitalists "a blank check," in contrast to Congress, which was even pushing privatization of essential public services such as transport, he stated.

13. (C) Reddy dismissed talk of recruiting the Maoists into a united Communist movement, pointing out that they are bent on taking over Nepal and carving out a corridor between north India and Nepal. In his home state of Andhra Pradesh (AP), the Maoists murder Communists, as they "cannot come to power as long as there are cadres waving the red flag in Parliament," he stated.

14. (C) Reddy acknowledged that India and the US have grown closer, that these ties will be "permanent," and that the Left parties "applaud" this trend. He claimed, however, that the US has yet to convince most Indians that it is "pro-India." It must first shed its cold war baggage, and learn to treat India as an "equal partner" rather than "a market for US goods." In AP, the CPI has grown by 25 percent to 96,000 members in the past year, with most new members under 45 and coming from rural areas. He lamented that the CPI would not have the same success in the "Hindi belt," where caste-based regional parties have marginalized all the national parties.

15. (C) Forward Bloc leader G Devarajan predicted that an energized Left would maintain labor agitation in urban areas, including strikes against electricity rate hikes, and increased FDI in the banking sector, while expanding its activities into the rural sector. He claimed that a coalition of CPI, CPI(M), and CPI(ML) activists would launch

a "mass education" campaign to forcibly occupy land in Bihar and distribute it to landless laborers, as a first step in planned expansion into Bihar, Jharkhand, and AP. Devarajan praised the election of Karat, saying that it would "change attitudes" and lead to a "more aggressive" left movement in India.

Comment

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16. (C) The past 12 months have been historic for India's Communist parties. They have gained unprecedented influence by becoming the "kingmakers" whose continued support keeps the UPA government in power, and passed leadership to a younger and more dynamic generation. They have also devised an ambitious expansion program and begun to dream of the day they can end their relationship with Congress and play an independent role in Indian politics. Karat enjoys widespread support within the Left and plans to energize the Communists to support a revamped agenda that will go beyond the traditional concerns of urban industrial workers. Under Karat, the Left will try to take up caste concerns currently monopolized by regional parties, move into territory currently occupied by the Maoists and mobilize the rural underclass (landless peasants, dalits, tribals) who have been largely left out of India's economic boom. The end goal is to fashion a Communist-dominated alliance capable of supplanting regional and Maoist parties and coming to power in New Delhi.

15. (C) Under Karat, the Left will also adopt a more modern focus against "globalization and liberalization." Far less parochial than India's traditional Communist leaders, Karat wants to place India's Communists in an international context by joining hands with "anti-globalization" movements in Latin America and South Asia. Despite his professed willingness to work with the US, Karat views Washington as the principal architect and anchor of a global system that works against Indian interests. In his view, confrontation between the US and an ascendant Left, while not imminent, is therefore inevitable. The ability of the Communist to carry-out their agenda will become clear in 2006, when they contest elections in their strongholds of Kerala and West Bengal.

BLAKE